



ESA Listings & Planning

Growth Management Services

GMA comprehensive plans, and development regulations crucial to state's salmon recovery efforts



Description

Since the Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed in 1990, local governments with a full set of planning requirements have undertaken extensive efforts in their communities to develop 20-year plans to carry out their visions for the future. Nearly all these counties and cities have developed ordinances to help protect critical areas, including fish and wildlife habitat areas. Despite the extensive planning local jurisdictions have done, many of Washington's communities are faced with developing salmon recovery strategies due to listings under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

What more do local governments need to do? Plans and development regulations will need to be reviewed to determine if they are consistent with wild salmon and steelhead recovery efforts. Communities will need to "apply the ESA filter" to the work they have done.

Background

All counties and cities in Washington are required to designate and protect critical areas, including fish and wildlife conservation areas. Policies and development regulations need to be adopted that enable local governments to prevent harm to critical habitat functions and values. Objective performance standards are necessary for carrying out and enforcing the ordinances.



Comprehensive plans and development regulations, including critical areas ordinances and resource land conservation ordinances, provide a framework for local governments to use to develop and carry out salmon recovery plans. Under GMA's goals on environmental protection, resource lands, and sprawl reduction, communities can develop policies and regulations to protect streams, habitat, and wetlands; conserve resource lands; and direct most new urban growth to urban areas.

In setting out how their community will grow over the next 20 years, communities determine how much land is needed for residential, commercial, and industrial development. They also decide where these uses should be located and how big building lots should be.

Consistent with the needs of salmon, these decisions should conserve resource lands, minimize sprawl, maintain the integrity of open space corridors, and encourage economic development within the capacities of the state's natural resources.



Communities also assess the needs for current and future water, stormwater, sewer, and other services. Decisions about how to provide these services and to enhance habitat are made through the capital facilities chapter of the comprehensive plan.

In addition to carrying out comprehensive plans through capital projects, the plans can be implemented through development regulations, operating budgets, and education and incentive programs. Incentives include things such as tax deferrals and expedited permitting.

In 1995 a new section to the GMA was adopted that requires local governments to use the best available science when designating and protecting critical areas. The GMA amendment also requires local governments to give special consideration to conservation or protection measures necessary to preserve or enhance anadromous fisheries. The Washington Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development adopted guidance in 2000 to assist local governments with how to identify and include the best available science when designating and protecting critical areas.

What's Being Done

In 1998 new state laws were passed to enhance the state's wild salmon and steelhead recovery efforts. Mechanisms have been set up so that local and tribal governments and others in different areas of the state can prioritize lists of salmon enhancement projects, develop watershed plans, and create salmon habitat recovery plans. Funds have been allocated for these efforts.

State grant programs are being reviewed to determine how they can target their grants and loans to help with wild salmon and steelhead recovery projects.

State agencies have developed information to help local governments educate their citizens about the causes of wild salmon and steelhead decline and how they can help the species recover.



What's Next

Fully planning counties and cities are required to review, evaluate, and, if necessary, revise their comprehensive plans and development regulations according to a schedule established by the state Legislature and approved by the Governor in 2002 and amended by ESHB 2171 in 2005. Part of this work includes updating their critical areas and natural resource lands ordinances according to this schedule. This GMA Update provides an opportunity for counties and cities to: (1) review their plans and regulations and, if necessary, update them, (2) include the best available science in their critical areas and resource lands ordinances, and (3) develop new salmon recovery measures.

Comprehensive plans may need to be reviewed to determine if a local jurisdiction's salmon recovery objectives are adequate. Does the plan include policies that help comply with the ESA? Do land uses, stormwater, ways to reduce pavement, or other issues need to be revisited? Are the local government's salmon-related policies consistent with those of their neighbors in the watershed? Is there a need for new county-wide planning policies to ensure a coordinated approach to salmon recovery in the watershed?

Local governments may need to look at capital facilities planning. Functional plans that support comprehensive plans, such as water and sewer plans, may need to be reviewed to determine if the projects they contain are consistent with wild salmon and steelhead recovery objectives. Regional groundwater management plans and watershed plans also may need to be revised or developed to make sure their policies and projects are consistent with wild salmon recovery objectives and are included in comprehensive plans.

The adequacy of development regulations should be reviewed in relation to salmon recovery objectives. Special attention should be paid to development standards, clearing and grading ordinances, and stormwater management, which impact habitat characteristics.

Salmon have specialized and unique habitat requirements that are met by properly functioning habitat. Salmon need:

- Adequate stream flows.
- Cool, well-oxygenated, clean water.
- Streambed gravels relatively free of fine sediments.
- Adequate food supply.
- Instream structural diversity, i.e., pools, riffles, and hiding and resting places.
- Stabilized stream banks.

County-wide planning policies also may need to be revised. In addition to watershed planning, this is a way local jurisdictions can jointly develop environmental policies beneficial to salmon.

The ESA and growth management share many of the same goals. The ESA and the GMA Update provide local governments an opportunity to review their plans and regulations to make sure that they achieve sustainability for both fish and people. Sustainability means a community can provide services for current residents and growth without taking away from resources that future generations will need.

Photos: CTED/Rita R. Robison; Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Snohomish County

For More Information

Leonard Bauer, Managing Director
Growth Management Services
360.725.3000

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